

The World Has Turned (and Left Me Here) by osaki_nana_707

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Summary:

Steve really doesn't know how to tell anyone 'no'.

Steve didn't plan on going out with the cast after the show, but Dustin had given him The Eyes, and he'd caved. Just dinner. No drinks. He doesn't think that's unreasonable, considering how long it's been since he's been anywhere that isn't a kid-friendly place.

Or, Steve and Dustin spend some time together and talk about some things.

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Author's Note:

Please read the other stories in the series before you read this one, otherwise it probably won't make sense :)

The World Has Turned (and Left Me Here)

Steve really doesn't know how to tell anyone 'no'.

Steve didn't plan on going out with the cast after the show, but Dustin had given him The Eyes, and he'd caved. Just dinner. No drinks. He doesn't think that's unreasonable, considering how long it's been since he's been *anywhere* that isn't a kid-friendly place.

It's Dustin's argument too, as they settle in at a long table made of several other tables pushed together, the cast and crew loudly chatting over them. "Make you feel young again, going out like this?" Dustin teases, grinning.

"I'm not even thirty, *Jesus*," Steve hisses, though he's certainly feeling ancient surrounded by all these fresh faces. "You're only five years younger than me, Dustin."

"Still younger than you," Dustin says, only proud of that now that he's old enough to make decisions and be listened to. Steve can remember a time when it frustrated Dustin that he didn't have Steve's authority, when Dustin thought Steve was the Coolest Person on Earth. Now Dustin is the man in charge, working on a Master's in Science while minoring in Theatre (a combination that only makes sense to Steve when he thinks of who it is who's doing it), and Steve is just a nobody from small town Hawkins, cool only through the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia.

Steve is far more envious of how together Dustin is, how passionate he is, how he's setting up his own life for a career he'll genuinely

enjoy. It's not that Steve hates his job, of course. He appreciates the pull he has being the son of the company owner, appreciates that he can work from home and spend time with Hannah, appreciates the paycheck and the things it can help him afford. He'll never complain about where he ended up because all-in-all, it's not bad. He's mostly just disappointed in *himself* rather than *his path*. He never thought himself smart enough for much else. Dustin's brilliant in so many ways, as loud as he is bright. He's everything Steve's never been, or at least never had the courage to be. He'll never understand what Dustin ever saw in him as a hero to begin with, but if he can at least bask in the glow, it's good enough for him.

"It's good to see you," Dustin says candidly after a moment. He's gotten so handsome, Steve thinks. He's tall and his eyes are bright, and he's really figured out how to do his hair. "I didn't get the chance to say that earlier because I was freaking out."

"I don't know why you thought of *me* when it comes to sewing," Steve says with a shrug. "I'm not that good at it and you've probably got people on campus who could have helped."

Dustin grins. Steve knows that grin.

"It was an excuse," Steve answers for him.

"You probably wouldn't have come if I didn't have a reason, right? I mean, I had told the whole cast about you and they were just *dying* to meet you."

Steve barks out a laugh. "Dude. All you had to do was ask me to come see the show. You know I would."

"Would you?" Dustin asks, and Steve feels called out. Justifiably called out. He suddenly recalls he's missed Dustin's last two shows.

"Okay. Look," Steve offers in his defense, "you're the one who keeps doing these *adult* shows. I couldn't bring Hannah. You know that."

"I mean, you let her watch *Dirty Dancing*."

"You're performing *The Rocky Horror Show*, Dustin. I think it's a little more hardcore than *Dirty Dancing*."

Dustin laughs. He's so grown up now, but when he laughs he sounds the same as he did all those years ago.

"Okay, okay, you got me," Dustin concedes. "I'm not sore at you. I just missed you. You and me, we're bros. Batman and Robin, y'know? I need my sidekick sometimes, Steve!"

"*I'm* the sidekick? *I'm Robin?*"

"You can be Nightwing. How about that?"

"I don't know who that is, Dustin."

Dustin scoffs, tosses his hands up dramatically. Being in theatre has done him nothing but favors in being err... *theatrical*. "I'm not even going to dignify that with a response, Steven Glenn Harrington!"

"First of all, saying that is a response. Second of all, that's not even my middle name... That... that's *your* middle name."

"Whatever! It has a nice ring to it! I improvised."

Steve rolls his eyes, but he can feel a smile tugging at his lips.

"So," Dustin says instead, "where is Hannah-Banana tonight anyway?"

"Oh, Billy's watching her for me," Steve says casually, perusing the menu. Everything on it seems so *greasy*. He hasn't eaten food this bad since *college*.

"Billy?" Dustin questions, confused. "Who the fuck is Billy?"

Steve raises his eyebrows. He doesn't think before he speaks. "Billy Hargrove."

He really *should* think before he speaks.

"*Billy Hargrove?*" Dustin says after several moments of silence where all he can do is stare open-mouthed.

Steve needs to rescue this, but he's not very good at it. All he can

manage is, “Yeah, you know. Max’s brother.”

“Yeah, Steve. I *know*. He’s Max’s *step*-brother who beat the shit out of you. I *remember*.”

So dramatic.

Steve sets the menu down and levels Dustin with The Look. Dustin has The Eyes, but being a dad has really helped Steve perfect The Look. “He’s not like that anymore,” he says. “God, Dustin, that was ten fucking years ago.”

“He almost *killed* you! He was *going* to kill Lucas!”

“I really don’t think it was that intense.”

“How would you know? You were unconscious.”

Steve ignores the fact that he sort of has a point. “Whatever. Like I said, he’s different now. He moved back to town with his little girl. Hannah and Katie are best friends, so I mean, I’m bound to interact with him some. Max is letting him live in her house while she’s at school, so she must have forgiven him, right?”

Dustin waffles over this. He’s still got a hell of a soft spot for Max. It shows in the way he dates almost exclusively red-haired girls. “She must not have told Lucas,” he decides to say. “If she had, he would’ve told me.”

Steve shrugs. Dustin still looks scandalized, and it’s clear he’s not done with this conversation. Steve’s only saving grace is that the waiter appears at that time so he can distract himself by ordering. He goes with a cheeseburger and fries and hopes it doesn’t give him indigestion later.

God, he really is getting old.

“I don’t understand,” Dustin says once the waiter leaves, like their conversation has never paused. “You’re telling me that Billy Hargrove is a *dad*? How the fuck did that happen?”

“Are you seriously asking me how babies are made?”

“You know that’s not what I’m asking you. So, what’s the deal? He has a wife? Billy Hargrove?”

“No, he doesn’t. It’s just him and Katie. The mom is uh... not in the picture.”

“I’d run too.”

“*Dude*,” Steve says firmly, and it’s only then that Dustin seems to realize that Steve isn’t fucking around here.

“I... are you... friends now? After everything that happened?”

“Yeah,” Steve says, “because he’s not like that anymore. He apologized about that shit. He’s... He’s trying really hard to be better for his little girl, alright? You’d be impressed if you saw.”

Dustin squints, skeptical.

“You *would!*” Steve argues, and he can’t help but realize this is the exact way Hannah argues with him. He really needs to get out more, spend more time with adults.

“It smells fishy, Steve,” Dustin says. “This guy shows up again out of nowhere and makes you *think* he’s a changed man, but what if he’s really just out to betray you, huh? What if he’s not so nice after all?”

“I didn’t say he was *nice*,” Steve laughs, shaking his head. Sometimes Dustin can still be very-much-thirteen. “He’s still a dick, just... less of one.” He can’t help but think of their conversation earlier, how much it had put him at ease that Billy had claimed not to notice his new specs, even though he certainly did. When he’d smiled, it had made Steve feel warm all over.

Hey, wait, had he called him *Steve*?

No. No, that was surely just him remembering it wrong.

“Oh. My. God. Why... why are you making that face?” Dustin says, looking horrified.

“What? What face?” Steve jolts. He feels like he’s been caught with

his hand in the cookie jar, even though he isn't doing anything.

"That... that dopey, dreamy look. You gotta know you're making that face."

"What *face*? This is just my face, Dustin."

"Steven Not-Glenn Harrington, I've known you ten years. I know what your face looks like."

"You don't even know my middle name."

"I still know your face and it doesn't always look like that. It only looks like that when you're *crushing* on someone, and oh, my God, please tell me you were thinking of *someone else*--"

"Enough," Steve says, warm all the way down to the collar of his shirt. He feels like the whole table is staring at him, even though it's only Dustin. Dustin stares people down with enough intensity for ten though, Steve thinks. "Jesus, Dustin, I'm not some kid, okay? I don't get 'crushes' on people, and even if I did, I don't have a crush on *him*, alright? You can unclench."

"I will not 'unclench', Steve. This is serious. I mean, you know I don't care if you're bisexual. Who you hop into bed with is none of my business." Steve still doesn't know how he feels about Dustin talking like that, even though he's an adult now, but he does appreciate his open-mindedness. "I mean, I was the first person you told after you figured it out, and honestly that was pretty fucking rad."

"How is that rad?"

"You *trusted* me with something so *personal*-- but anyway, that's besides the point. What I'm trying to say is, I don't care who you go out with, but... really, Steve? *Billy Hargrove*?"

"I just said that I didn't have a crush on him!"

"Just like you said you weren't still in love with Nancy after you two broke it off? Just like you said you and Colleen weren't going to split up?"

“Dude, harsh,” Steve mumbles, shoulders hunching. Dustin winces right as he says it, realizing it’s the wrong thing to say at the same time.

“Sorry,” Dustin says softly.

Their appetizers arrive right on cue. Dustin has ordered an *ungodly* amount of mozzarella sticks. Steve kind of wants to cram them all into his mouth just so he doesn’t have to keep talking about this. Instead he runs a hand through his hair and looks everywhere but at Dustin’s face. It’s easier if they’re not making eye contact.

“I don’t have a crush on anyone,” Steve says, “but... it’s... it’s been nice, having him around, okay? Since Colleen left and the move back to Hawkins, I’ve been... lonely. I’ve got Hannah, and she’s great, and I love her, but she’s a kid. I can’t talk to her about my problems. All of my friends in Hawkins have moved on to greener pastures, and Billy’s the only guy around that... gets it. Kind of. I mean, he doesn’t know about *everything*, but...”

Dustin’s brows furrow, and he worries his lip between his teeth. He eats three mozzarella sticks before he says anything else. “You told me the nightmares stopped.”

“Just like I told you I wasn’t in love with Nancy. And like I told you Colleen and I weren’t going to split up.”

“Why didn’t you... why didn’t you say anything?” Dustin asks, and when he looks up it feels like they’re in Steve’s BMW at the Snow Ball, feels like Dustin is vulnerable and nervous and thirteen and all the insecurity that being thirteen brings with it. It amps up Steve’s urge to protect, to shut off his own vulnerability in favor of placating another’s, and he realizes that’s sort of the problem.

“I didn’t want you guys to worry about me,” Steve says. “It’s kind of stupid to still even have the nightmares. I mean, everyone else seems to be getting on just fine nowadays. Just a bad memory.”

“Will still has them,” Dustin says, quieter. “He has them so bad he falls out of bed some nights, sleepwalks to other places.”

"I didn't even go through *half* the shit that Will did," Steve says, and his voice feels watery and clogged in his throat.

"It doesn't *matter*," Dustin says in the way that proves he believes it one hundred percent. He's earnest and bright-eyed and it makes Steve's heart absolutely *ache*. "It still happened. You're allowed to deal with that shit, okay? You *have* to deal with it."

He thinks of Billy, thinks of how he'd given him the same advice not so long ago.

"You're right," Steve says, snaking a hand up under his glasses to rub at one eye, hoping to banish any tears that threaten to spill out. "I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize for it, Steve. Just... let us help, if you need it. Do what you have to do to make you feel better... I hate to ask, but... hanging out with Billy, does it make you feel better?"

"Yeah... yeah, it does."

"Then..." He physically winces, like it's painful. So dramatic. "You have my blessing. Go forth and bang him as you wish."

"I'm not banging--" Steve sighs, reaches out, ruffles Dustin's curls. "You're a shithead."

"I'm *your* shithead."

"One of many."

"I'm your favorite shithead though."

"God, I hate that you are," Steve says. Dustin grins. Steve grins back.

"Well," Dustin says. "Since you and Billy are uh... 'hanging out', you should come visit. You said I'd be impressed so... impress me."

"Are you just looking for an excuse to get me to come back?"

"Yes."

"I... I will. Come back. More often. And I'll call more. Maybe we can all get together at some point, you and me and the others. It's been a long time."

"I could maybe make some calls, see if that can be arranged," Dustin says delightedly. "Spring Break is coming up anyway. Seems like a good opportunity to get the band back together."

Steve thinks he'd like that a lot. The warmth of the idea curbs his loneliness right up until the end of dinner when he gets in the car to go home. The cold seeps back in as the rain patters his windshield, and Steve turns the radio up loud to drown it out. It stays though, settling into his backseat, a reminder, a fear.

Everyone leaves eventually.

Shit.

Author's Note:

i'm on [tumblr](#)